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PATENT



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INK RECEPTIVE DAMPENING SYSTEM FOR
LITHOGRAPHIC PRINTING PRESS

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TECHNICAL FIELD OF THE INVENTION

5 The invention is directed to dampening roller
systems for lithographic printing presses and in
particular, to a dampening system having a gear driven
intermediate oscillating roller and an ink receptive
surface, which system is easily adapted for retrofitting
10 existing lithographic presses.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

 High speed rotary lithographic printing plates
require ink to be continuously applied to a rotating
plate cylinder carrying a printing plate having an ink
15 receptive image chemically formed thereon. The image is
transferred from the plate cylinder onto a blanket
cylinder which rolls against paper to be printed and
impresses the image onto the paper. In order to maintain
even pressure between the plate cylinder and the blanket
20 cylinder and to provide a clear, crisp image without
smearing, the areas of the printing plate which do not
receive ink are appropriately treated to receive a thin
coating of water or another dampening fluid. An
appropriate thickness of dampening fluid, corresponding
25 to the thickness of ink, is desired so that even
hydraulic pressure results upon rolling contact between
the plate cylinder and the blanket cylinder.

The plate cylinder is supplied with both ink and water during printing operations. The ink is supplied through a series of ink transfer rollers and the dampening fluid, which is usually water, with or without a small quantity of additives to adjust surface tension or other characteristics, is supplied through a series of dampening rollers.

In the past, the dampening roller systems have been two basic types. One type meters the amount of water using a ducting roller which periodically contacts a form roller which rotates in a pan of dampening fluid to carry fluid to the ducting roller. The ducting roller then moves out of contact with the pan roller and contacts one of the transfer rollers for a period of time. The speed of the pan and ducting rollers and the dwell time determines the quantity of water transferred to the plate cylinder.

Another type of dampening system is a continuous supply dampening system in which the transfer rollers continuously and simultaneously communicate with both a pan roller and a transfer roller. The quantity of dampening fluid is metered by (1) setting the pressure at a contact line or "nip" point between the pan roller and a transfer roller, or (2) an adjustable speed control motorized pan roller, using a slip nip for metering. A continuous dampening system is normally desirable for efficient high speed rotary press operation.

In a dampening system using a ducting roller, a pan roller is partially immersed into a reservoir or pan of water or dampening fluid which is maintained at a substantially constant level. The pan roller rotates in the water or dampening fluid lifting a quantity of the fluid onto the roller. A ductor roller intermittently contacts the pan roller. It rolls along the pan roller surface for a desired period of time accepting a quantity of water on the ductor roller. The ductor roller then moves out of contact with the pan roller and into contact

with an intermediate roller which is chrome plated or stainless steel, so that it is hydrophilic (i.e., water receptive). The intermediate roller accepts a quantity of water from the ducting roller onto its surface. The
5 intermediate roller is maintained in constant rolling contact with a form roller which accepts a quantity of water from the intermediate roller and applies it to the printing plate which is wrapped around and rotates with the plate cylinder. In order to maintain an even
10 thickness of water across the entire surface of the form roller, the intermediate roller may oscillate horizontally back and forth along its axis while it is in rolling contact with the form roller. The axial oscillating or vibrating action avoids "ghosting" which
15 might otherwise occur when the lithographic plate depletes the form roller of water in certain areas on a repeated continuous basis. The oscillation of the water receptive intermediate roller acts to smear the water onto the form roller. This continuously replenishes an
20 even layer of water across the entire surface so that the dry areas do not appear on the printed sheet.

It has previously been thought that dissimilarity between the soft fabric covered or rubber coated form roller and the hard chrome plated or stainless steel
25 oscillating roller was desirable. Such an arrangement allowed the two rollers to slide relative to each other while they were simultaneously in rolling contact. Further, the water receptive and grease or ink repulsive characteristic of the chrome or metal surface of the
30 oscillating roller was considered desirable to act as a barrier against ink transfer back up through the water dampening roller system. Ink contamination in the dampening fluid or the water source was reduced. For example, subsequent printing jobs with different colored
35 inks could sometimes be printed without purging the entire water dampening system.

In a continuous dampening system, the metering of the amount of water is not accomplished through intermittent oscillation of the ducting roller, but rather is accomplished through appropriate adjustment of pressure at a nip point between the pan rollers and the adjacent transfer roller. Typically, either the pan roller or the adjacent transfer roller had flexible rubber surfaces or other flexible polymeric surfaces which permitted adjustable pressure at the rolling contact line or the nip point. Adjustment of metering pressure was accomplished between the two flexible roller surfaces. Pressure between a transfer roller and an intermediate oscillating roller or between the oscillating roller and the form roller was generally fixed or set at a minimum contact level necessary for transfer of dampening fluid. It was generally thought to be undesirable to increase this pressure as it would increase friction and/or interfere with the relative sliding or oscillating motion of the rollers.

One system attempted to use an oscillating roller which was interposed in the series of transfer rollers as an intermediate oscillating roller. It was driven in rotation only by frictional rolling contact and it was driven in oscillation only with a fragile internal groove and tab mechanism. This system was fraught with deficiencies and has apparently been abandoned altogether. It appears that balancing the need for pressure for rolling contact with the need for an absence of pressure to allow the fragile oscillating mechanism to function was one factor which doomed such a system to failure.

In a dampening system described in U. S. Patent No. 4,949,637, issued to Keller on August 21, 1990, the amount of water applied was metered through the use of multiple adjustable pressure nip points. The intermediate roller had a rubber surface to permit adjusting pressure, but it did not oscillate. A separate

oscillating roller was held with a light spring tension either against the form roller, against the transfer roller, or two oscillating rollers were held, one against the form roller and one against the transfer roller. The oscillating roller had a rubber surface, 95 to 100 Durometer Shore A, and was rotated through rolling contact friction, not gear driven. The oscillating mechanism was a fragile mechanism small enough to fit inside the roller itself, interposed between the roller shaft and the roller itself. This system worked and continues to work well for small size presses, less than about 22 inches wide, but adequate pressure and oscillation for larger size presses is increasingly difficult to maintain, especially with very high speed presses.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Thus, the present invention overcomes various drawbacks of the prior art by providing a dampener system for a lithographic rotary press in which a consistent
5 thin evenly metered quantity of dampening fluid is supplied to a printing plate on the plate cylinder. The system is adaptable to high speed printing presses having wide width printing surfaces. The form roller which contacts both the plate cylinder and the oscillating
10 roller is not gear driven. The oscillating roller is gear driven and is uniquely constructed with an ink receptive surface. The oscillating roller is continuously supplied with a metered quantity of dampening fluid. Further, the lines of contact between
15 the oscillating roller and the form roller and also between the oscillating roller and a transfer roller are adapted for adjustable contact pressure.

It is an additional object of the present invention to provide a fluid dampening system for a lithographic
20 press in which all of the rollers in the dampening system have ink receptive surfaces. This allows a small portion of the ink which is applied directly to the plate cylinder with an inking system to become mixed with the dampening fluid and to be carried back up through the
25 dampening system in a consistently mixed homogenous fluid throughout so that the adjustability of the quantity of dampening fluid through pressure nip points in the dampening system is facilitated.

It is a further object of the present invention to
30 provide a convenient, cost-effective water and ink receptive dampening retrofit kit and method for retrofitting an existing press which uses the existing gear trains, bearing mounts, and oscillating drive mechanisms of existing presses. The retrofit kit and
35 method includes ink receptive oscillating rollers and further includes the addition of adjustable nip point metering, so that a fine, even layer of dampening fluid

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is consistently and continuously applied to the plate cylinder of the converted lithographic printing press. In particular, the existing oscillating roller is either replaced with a roller having an ink receptive

5 cylindrical surface or the existing chrome plated or metallic hydrophilic surface is treated through coating or etching or other means to convert it to an ink receptive surface. Further, ducting rollers for intermittently applying dampening fluid are replaced with
10 a continuous series of one or more transfer rollers which continuously communicate metered quantities of fluid from the pan roller onto the intermediate oscillating roller.

A pressure adjustment mechanism is provided for adjusting the nip point between the pan roller and the transfer
15 rollers and also for adjusting the nip pressure between the transfer rollers and the oscillating roller, as well as between the oscillating roller and the form roller.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

These and other objects and advantages of the invention will be more fully understood with reference to the following detailed description, claims and drawings, in which like numerals represent like elements and in which:

Figure 1 is a schematic side view depicting a plate cylinder with the inventive system of dampening rollers shown in operative positions according to the present invention;

Figure 2 is a partial perspective view of a dampening system according to the present invention showing a series of dampening rollers;

Figure 3 is a side view of a gear driven and external eccentrically operated intermediate oscillating roller which is both gear driven from the plate cylinder and positively oscillated with a press driven eccentrically operated arm;

Figure 4 is a schematic depiction of an assembly view depicting replacement of the existing intermediate oscillating roller with a roller according to the present invention and replacement of existing dampening system transfer rollers and pan roller with an assembly corresponding to the present invention;

Figure 5 is a first alternative construction of an ink receptive oscillating roller according to the present invention;

Figure 6 is a schematic depiction of a second alternative construction of an ink receptive oscillating roller according to the present invention; and

Figure 7 is a schematic depiction of a third alternative construction or conversion of an oscillating roller for ink receptivity according to the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Figure 1 shows a schematic side view of a dampening assembly view according to the present invention in position with a lithographic printing press. A fluid supply 14 fills a pan or reservoir 16 as required to maintain the dampening fluid 20 at a particular level. A fluid level maintenance system 18 may be used, which includes a level activated valve and fill tube, attached in a known fashion. The dampening fluid 20 is typically water, but may also consist of water with additives for appropriately regulating the surface tension or other characteristics of the water. Sometimes a mixture of alcohol and water might be used; however, it has been found that the alcohol/water mixture has other drawbacks and disadvantages such that its use is not normally justified.

A series of rollers transfer the dampening fluid or water to the surface of plate cylinder 12. A pan roller 22, sometimes known as a dipping roller, a fountain roller, or a water take-up roller, is partially immersed in dampening fluid 20 in pan 16. Pan roller 22 rotates through the water and a layer or quantity of water is carried upward from the pan on roller surface 24 which is preferably a smooth polymeric surface of rubber or nylon having a hardness, measured according to the Shore A Durometer scale of 95 to 100 durometer. Such a polymeric surface is both water receptive and ink receptive. A transfer roller 26 which is a primary metering transfer roller 26 also preferably has a smooth polymeric roller surface 28 which rolls in contact with surface 24 of pan roller 22. Preferably, roller surface 28 is ink and water receptive and has a hardness of 25 to 40 durometer. (Throughout, (this application) the preferred measurements of hardness will be set forth according to the Shore A Durometer scale.) Transfer roller 26 continuously rolls against pan roller 22 receiving dampening fluid therefrom and carrying the dampening fluid through rotation for

ultimate transfer to the plate cylinder 12. In the preferred embodiment depicted in Figure 1, a reverse direction transfer roller 30 rolls against primary metering transfer roller 26, picking up dampening fluid on its roller surface 32 and carries the fluid on toward plate cylinder 12. Preferably, roller surface 32 is a polymeric surface which is water and ink receptive having a durometer of between 25 and 40. Preferably, the hardness of the transfer roller and the reverse direction transfer rollers are adjusted towards the opposite ends of the 25 to 40 durometer range to reduce friction therebetween, particularly during press start-up when the rollers are "dry."

An intermediate roller 34 receives dampening fluid from the transfer rollers 26 and 30, and in particular in the embodiment shown in Figure 1, from rolling contact with reverse direction transfer roller 30. Intermediate roller 34 moves back and forth in the axial direction, such that it is known as a vibrating or an oscillating roller 34. As will be shown more fully below, with reference to Figure 2, intermediate oscillating roller 34 is positively driven, as from plate cylinder 12, as with a series of meshing spur gears. Also, uniquely according to the present invention, oscillating roller 34 is provided with a surface 36 which is both water receptive and ink receptive. Preferably, surface 36 comprises a polymeric surface made of smooth rubber or smooth nylon. In the arrangement depicted, surface 36 preferably has a hardness of between about 95 and 100 durometer. The water and ink receptive surface 36 carries dampening fluid from the transfer rollers and provides it through rolling and sliding contact to a form roller 38. The surface of form roller 38 is preferably ink receptive, such as a polymeric surface, which for the purposes of providing a smooth, very thin evenly metered quantity of dampening fluid to plate cylinder 12, has a hardness in the range of between 25 and 30 durometer. A second form

roller 42, shown in phantom lines, having a second form roller surface 44, and which is preferably a polymeric material having a hardness in the range of 25 to 30 durometer, may also be used, but is not required for proper operation of the dampening fluid system according to the present invention.

Unlike intermittent or ducting dampening systems which the present invention is adapted to replace, metering of the dampening fluid is accomplished through nip points where the transfer rollers contact one another to form a line or "stripe" of contact. The primary metering for the present invention is accomplished at primary metering nip point 46. Water carried upward on roller 22 is squeezed or "squeegeed" off of pan roller 22 at nip point 46 along a line which extends across the entire face of roller 22. Only a small quantity of water successfully spreads the contacting surfaces 24 and 28 by hydraulic pressure action. The remainder forms a small wave which drips or sprays back into pan 16. A portion of the quantity of dampening fluid which moves past nip point 46 is carried on surface 24 and another quantity is carried on surface 28. A portion of this is transferred at contact point 52 onto reverse transfer roller 32. As the direction of rotation places contact point 52 above the rollers, any small wave of water formed at contact point 52 continues to be trapped by rotation and the force of gravity at the "V" between surfaces 28 and 32. Thus, nip point 52 does not normally function as an efficiently effective metering nip point. Again, a portion of the fluid moving through point 52 is carried on surface 28 back to metering nip point 46 while another portion is carried on surface 32 to nip point 48 where surface 32 contacts surface 36 of oscillating roller 34.

In previous systems where the surface of the oscillating roller was chrome plated or stainless steel or another metallic surface which was hydrophilic and was not ink receptive, contact between the transfer rollers

and the oscillating rollers did not form an effective nip point for metering the fluid. The goal was to merely provide transfer of fluid from the transfer rollers to the oscillating roller and onto the form roller and plate cylinder, without having any significant quantity of ink transferred in the opposite direction from the plate cylinder to the form roller to the oscillating roller and back upstream through the transfer rollers into the dampening system. For this reason, the surface of the oscillating roller repelled the ink. Nevertheless, ink was transferred from the form roller, but it resulted in a non-homogenous mixture of ink and water carried on the exterior of the oscillating roller. Any attempt to meter through nipping pressure with this non-homogenous fluid would likely face erratic if not totally unsuccessful results. Further, as indicated previously, for purposes of minimizing friction during oscillation or vibration of the roller in an axial direction, contact force normal to the cylinder (i.e., nip pressure) was minimized. Also, a smooth metallic chrome or stainless steel surface was used to minimize sliding friction.

Uniquely according to the present invention, using an ink receptive surface 36 facilitates formation of a homogenous mixture of the ink and dampening fluid which is carried on surface 36 of oscillating roller 34. As a result of this homogeneity, an effective nipping point 48 can be achieved at the rolling contact line between the oscillating roller and the transfer rollers. It has been found, contrary to traditional wisdom, that it is desirable to allow the mixture of water and ink to move in the reverse direction upstream through the series of dampening fluid transfer rollers. It appears in practice that the water rides on the ink, so that effective, uniform, and consistent transfer of water from the reservoir 16 onto plate cylinder 12 is facilitated by allowing an equilibrium condition of an ink and water mixture to be formed entirely throughout the dampening

system. During operation of the press for a short period of time, the movement of ink in a reverse direction is facilitated by ink receptive rollers at each position, all the way up the dampening system series of rollers.

5 Because of the resulting homogeneity of the mixture, a secondary split of the ink and water film is achieved at nip point 48 by positioning transfer roller 32 in interference contact with oscillating roller 34 so that a line of compression is achieved. Particularly where the
10 surface 36 of oscillating roller 34 is a compressible polymeric material, a line of compression is formed at each of the surfaces 32 and 36. Preferably, surface 36 is maintained at a sufficiently different hardness from hardness of surface 32, so that sliding contact is
15 facilitated. As the form roller 40 has been found to function well with a relatively soft surface for rolling against plate cylinder 12, it is preferable to have a harder surface 36 at nip point 50. Thus, the transfer rollers are made of a softer material so that there will
20 be reduced friction during axial oscillation at both nip points 48 and 50.

It is also theorized that, because of the "greasy" nature of ink and also because of the ability of ink to carry water in a type of coalescence or encapsulation,
25 the ink and water mixture acts as a very effective lubricant at nip points 48 and 50 to allow non-binding oscillation. Thus, where oscillating roller 34 is both gear driven in rotation and also externally driven with a strong, durable external eccentrically operated
30 mechanism, a press with a uniquely ink receptive oscillating roller has been found to have substantially improved performance characteristics.

It is noted that where the dampening fluid can be applied in a consistently evenly distributed layer, the
35 thickness of the water layer is very, very thin and has been characterized during desired operating conditions as more of a mist or a fog of dampening fluid rather than a

layer of dampening fluid. In normal atmospheric conditions, if the press is stopped suddenly, the entire quantity of dampening fluid on the plate cylinder may evaporate in seconds, leaving the plate cylinder (in non-inked areas) dry to the touch.

Further, as the nip point 50 between the oscillating roller and the form roller has substantially all the same characteristics as nip point 48, rolling pressure and sliding oscillation contact can be advantageously adjusted so that the layer of dampening fluid and ink mixture resulting on form roller 38 is squeezed and smeared into a very thin, even and consistent layer. The application of additional pressure at nip point 50, and the fact that the layer of ink and dampening fluid on receptive oscillating roller 34 is a substantially homogenous mixture, results in a smooth squeezing action without erratic "bubbles" or "globbs" of ink or water which might otherwise result in a non-homogenous mixture on an oscillating cylinder which is not ink receptive.

Figure 2 schematically depicts in a perspective view a plate cylinder with the gear driven dampening system according to the present invention. Gear 35 is driven from a series of gears so that the surface speed of the oscillating roller 34 is the same as the surface speed of form roller 38, which matches the surface speed of the plate cylinder. The pan roller 22 is preferably driven with a gear which meshes with a series of gears to allow pan roller to be driven to match the surface speed of the plate cylinder. Thus, the rotation of each of the rollers in the series is at a preferred 1:1 surface speed ratio. This ratio is believed desirable for purposes of maintaining effective hydraulic nip points between the rollers. However, consistently proportional speed differences between the rollers so that a controlled proportional slippage occurs at each nip point might also be useful without departing from the invention. Positive

driving of the oscillating roller as compared to being frictionally driven by surface contact between the form roller and the oscillating roller allows the system to start up and establish equilibrium without binding or breakage even for large press widths in excess of 22 inches.

In Figure 2, compressed lines or stripes 62 and 64 shown on the pan roller and transfer roller, respectively, are indicative of the pressure at nip point 46. Stripes are measured with the press stopped by holding the rollers in contact at a given rotary position for a short period of time and then quickly rotating the rollers a short distance to a new location. The area which indicates a substantial absence of ink or fluid due to the compression of the flexible surfaces of the respective rollers causes a stripe, the width of which depends upon the pressure between the rollers. The stripe should be adjusted so that it is an even width entirely along the length of the roller and further, the width of the stripe is set so that desired metering is accomplished. Typically, stripes measuring about $5/32$ nds of an inch at each of the nip points for a 22 inch rotary press will provide a fine consistent film of dampening fluid on the plate cylinder. At the nip between the metering and pan roller, more dampening fluid can be provided by having a narrower width stripe and less fluid can be provided by increasing the width of the stripe. The experience of the press operator will facilitate determining the width of the stripe for a particular press or for a particular lithographic printing job being performed on the press.

Also shown schematically in Figure 2 is an oscillating arm 66 which is engaged in a channel 68 which drives the oscillating roller axially back and forth. Oscillating arm 66 pivots about a fixed pivot point 70 through the operation of follower end 72 which follows an oscillating eccentrically operated mechanism 74 which

may be a cam, a crank, or other device which is directly driven through rotation of the press to produce an oscillating motion. This direct drive oscillating system is sufficient in the embodiment disclosed to move the oscillating roller 34 in an axial direction even at a substantially dry start-up condition and maintains a constant oscillating or vibrating action during operation. Once equilibrium is reached, the lubricating nature of the ink receptive surface with an ink and water mixture thereon, allows the eccentrically operated mechanism to function without adverse wear or power loss.

Figure 3 is a front view of an oscillating roller 34 according to the present invention, in which the operation of an oscillating eccentrically operated mechanism is schematically depicted as arrow 74 exterior to the oscillating roller 34. Sufficient size and strength allows adequate force to be applied for oscillating roller 34 even at dry or start-up conditions.

Figure 4 schematically depicts a side assembly view of an existing lithographic press 82 showing a kit and method for conversion of its ink dampening system to a continuous dampening system with an ink receptive oscillating roller according to the present invention. The existing transfer rollers and the intermediate chrome plated or metallic oscillating roller are removed. The driving mechanism for the form roller 38 and the oscillating roller are retained. The existing oscillating roller is replaced in an assembly step 84 with an oscillating roller 34 having an ink receptive surface 36, either the same or a substantially duplicate drive gear 35 and external oscillation mechanism (not shown in Figure 5) is reused. A pan roller and transfer roller assembly 86 can be bolted to the press 82 in an appropriate position. Preferably, assembly 86 has the pan roller 22 and first and second transfer rollers 26 and 30 appropriately positioned and mounted within a frame 88. The frame is bolted as at 90 and 92 in frame

88 to the press as at 91 and 93, respectively, during another assembling step 94. The nip pressure between transfer roller 26 and pan roller 22 is provided by adjustable positioning means 96 so that the desired width metering stripe can be achieved. Once the location of roller 26 is adjusted, it can be locked down in the desired position for operation. The nip pressure between roller 30 and oscillating roller 34 may, for example, be achieved with position adjustment means 98 which is secured between press 82 and dampener assembly frame 88.

Figures 5, 6 and 7 depict alternative constructions and methods for making the surface 36 of oscillating roller 34 ink receptive, either for purposes of building a press with the desired dampening system or for purposes of converting existing oscillating rollers. Figure 6 schematically depicts an existing oscillating roller 100 having a length measurement 102 and a diameter 104. The central hub 106 of new ink receptive oscillating roller 34 will have a corresponding length dimension but will have an exterior diameter 108 substantially smaller than the final surface diameter 104 of the existing roller. A polymeric sleeve 110 corresponding to the exterior surface 36 is pressed or otherwise formed securely over the interior hub 106 and has a length and width which is the same as the roller that it replaces.

In Figure 6, a machining process and assembly is schematically depicted in which an existing roller 100 has its surface diameter made smaller as at machining operation 112. A polymeric sleeve 114 is press fit or otherwise formed securely on the machined roller 100 to form a new oscillating roller 34.

In Figure 7, an appropriate etching or coating solution 116 is applied as with application means 118 to the surface 120 of existing oscillating roller 100. The etching or coating solution is such that the diameter 104 is not substantially changed. After a required period of time, the etched roller or the coated roller is immersed

in an etching terminating rinse or a curing bath as the case may be. The resulting surface is ink receptive.

5 The ink receptive roller from either of Figures 6, 7, or 8 is then installed or reinstalled in the press as indicated in Figure 5. The press is otherwise converted with appropriate continuous feed dampening transfer rollers according to the present invention.

10 Thus, what has been disclosed is a dampening system and a dampening system retrofit kit and method by which a lithographic press is provided with an entirely ink receptive dampening system having a gear driven ink receptive oscillating roller. Thus, a consistent smooth thin layer of metered dampening fluid can be continuously applied to a lithographic press. Further, the conversion or retrofitting of an existing press is simple and cost-
15 effective as the oscillating mechanism of the existing press, the bearings, gears and oscillating drive mechanisms are essentially reused without substantial redesign, except for the inventive features of the oscillating roller and transfer rollers or equivalent
20 modifications as described herein.

25 While the invention has been described in connection with preferred embodiments, it is not intended to limit the scope of the invention to the particular form or forms set forth, but on the contrary, it is intended to cover such alternatives, modifications, and equivalents as may be included within the spirit and scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims.